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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
Sixty-third session

Summary record of the 1380th meeting
Held at the Palais Nations, Geneva, on Thursday, 18 February 2016, at 3 p.m.

Chair: Ms. Hayashi

Contents

Consideration of reports of States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Sweden (continued)

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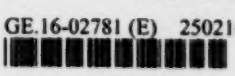

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Sweden (continued) (CEDAW/C/SWE/8-9; CEDAW/C/SWE/Q/8-9 and Add.1)

Articles 1 to 6 (continued)

1. **Ms. Nilsson Kelly** (Sweden) said that she wished to point out that Sweden currently had no action plans in place, since all those referred to in the report had expired. A strategy to combat violence against women would be included in the forthcoming strategy for achieving gender equality, and a new action plan on combating the sexual exploitation of children would be introduced. It would be a continuation of earlier plans but would also address the issue of sexual abuse via the Internet.

2. **Ms. Bernes** (Sweden) said that the State party had insisted on including provisions on gender-based violence in the Arms Trade Treaty in the face of scepticism on the part of other countries. Sweden had, of course, ratified the Treaty and had established one of the world's strictest systems for maintaining control over arms exports. The country's own assessment criteria and those provided for in the Treaty were applied in parallel, with the most restrictive provision applying in each case. An all-party parliamentary commission had issued a report in June 2015 on proposed amendments to the legislation governing such exports. A review of the Military Equipment Act had been initiated on the basis of the report and the broad consultations that had been held in that regard, and a new bill was to be submitted in the second quarter of 2017.

Articles 7 to 9

3. **Ms. Acosta Vargas**, addressing issues under articles 7 and 8 of the Convention, said that, despite the feminism embedded in the State party's policy, for which she had the deepest respect, it was nonetheless difficult, for historical and political reasons, to achieve equality between women and men, and the situation therefore required constant monitoring. The State party was to be commended on the steady increase in participation by women — especially young women — at the polls and in political activity generally, even though the women's movement had unfortunately encountered some setbacks in the latest elections. One of the best ways of maintaining the ground gained by women in parliament and the judiciary might be to expand the participation of young women, indigenous women and women born abroad. With regard to the subject of quotas, she would like to know whether private companies could be required to take action if it was found that women were being discriminated against in terms of board membership. The State party's systematic efforts to achieve parity in its representation at the international level, as stipulated in article 8 of the Convention, were praiseworthy. Had Sweden also nominated women to serve in international courts and other legal bodies? The country's feminist foreign policy was crucial to ensuring observance of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security and the Committee's general recommendation No. 30, which strengthened the case for women as peace mediators. She would like to know whether those guidelines would be included in the national plan and when the plan would be adopted. She also wished to know whether Swedish firms abroad were held to the State party's standards on work and safety.

4. Turning to issues under article 9 of the Convention, she asked whether women arriving in Sweden looking for employment and accommodation were granted a residence permit only if they were in a relationship with a Swedish man. She wondered whether rules could be established to give victims of gender-based violence the right to a residence visa that could not then be revoked. Was there a mechanism to enable women

who were in the country illegally to report gender-based violence without facing sanctions? Lastly, she would like to know what proportion of the people reaching Sweden from conflict areas were women and whether any quotas were in place for women with children.

5. **Ms. Baralt** (Sweden) said that most of the refugees arriving in Sweden came from Syria, but some were from Afghanistan and its neighbouring countries. Her country's biggest development cooperation programme on gender equality was, in fact, in Afghanistan. The unaccompanied minors reaching Sweden were nearly all boys, which meant that their sisters and mothers had stayed behind, so the Government was working with NGOs to look into the question of how to provide opportunities for the girls and women who remained in their countries of origin, those who were joining the flow of migrants and those who made their way to Sweden. At the forthcoming meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York, the side event to be put on by Sweden would be about protection for the rights of women and girl migrants and refugees.

6. **Ms. Peyron** (Sweden) said that the Swedish resettlement scheme followed the priorities set out by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, under which women and girls at risk were a priority. A temporary residence permit was initially granted if a woman had lived as part of a couple on a permanent basis abroad and wished to continue to do so in Sweden. If a relationship ended because a woman or her children had been abused, the woman could remain in Sweden.

7. **Mr. Hellström** (Sweden) said that his country's high voter turnouts showed how deeply rooted democracy was in Swedish society, and the higher the turnout, the more equal representation would be. In the run-up to the 2014 election, the Government had encouraged people to vote by promoting school elections, providing funding for political parties and running campaigns aimed at young people and groups that did not usually vote. The same types of measures would be taken prior to the 2018 elections.

8. **Ms. Bernes** (Sweden) said that gender equality was at the core of the country's feminist foreign policy. When appointing members of international bodies, a gender balance was always a consideration. The three Swedish judges appointed to the European Court of Human Rights since 1988 had all been women. In accordance with the talent pipeline initiative introduced by the Secretary-General, Swedish women were being encouraged to apply for senior positions in peacekeeping operations. Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) was a very important instrument in efforts to ensure that women would take part in peacekeeping, mediation and peacebuilding operations, and the Government had been working to identify qualified women for such positions.

9. With regard to women on the boards of directors of private companies, Sweden had developed a highly ambitious policy on corporate social responsibility. To that end, it had produced the Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, which was based on the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Under the Action Plan, which had been launched in August 2015, firms were required to respect the human rights of all their workers in all their activities, regardless of where they were based.

10. **Ms. Ameline** asked the delegation to comment on the fact that the Feminist Initiative Party had not been particularly successful at the last election.

11. **Ms. Patten** said that the State party was to be commended on its commitment to conflict prevention and management. She would like to learn how the Government knew that its international development work was resulting in increased participation by women in peace negotiations and the implementation of peace agreements. To what extent were measures that increased women's political participation in post-conflict situations an integral part of its development assistance strategies? Were development efforts also focused on broader issues relating to judicial, electoral and constitutional

reform? In particular, given that strategies for the promotion of peace and security were essential instruments for integrating Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) into development cooperation activities, she wished to know to what extent, in the implementation of those activities in conflict areas, did consultations with national and local actors involve women's organizations and what action was taken to promote education and employment.

12. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that she would welcome clarification on the explanation given in paragraph 377 of the State party's report (CEDAW/C/SWE/8-9) regarding the Ordinance on ID Cards for Persons Registered in Sweden.

13. **Ms. Schulz** said that she hoped that Sweden would continue to play an active role in achieving gender parity in United Nations treaty bodies and quasi-judicial mechanisms. To that end, however, it should also put forward qualified male candidates for the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.

14. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that she would like to know whether, in the Action Plan on Business and Human Rights, due diligence was being monitored only at the level of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs or whether the Ministry of Labour was involved as well.

15. **Ms. Baralt** (Sweden) said that the Government would provide a written clarification of the statements made in paragraph 377 of the report. Although the Feminist Initiative Party had not won any seats in the national parliament, it had succeeded in doing so in the European Parliament. She appreciated Ms. Schulz's point. A gender balance had been sought in the delegation of Sweden to the Committee, and the Government would discuss the matter further with the other Nordic countries. With regard to an earlier question regarding women's representation in senior corporate positions, she was pleased to inform the Committee that legislation would shortly be introduced which was designed to lead to an increase in the number of women on companies' boards of directors.

16. **Ms. Bernes** (Sweden) said that the Swedish International Development Agency was required to do gender assessments for all its programmes. Gender equality was one of the top three priorities for development cooperation and had been integrated into all aspects of development operations. The Agency's action plan for the next three years called for continued gender mainstreaming efforts and for the expansion of those efforts into new sectors. The Folke Bernadotte Academy, which was attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was the lead agency for the country's work in the field of security sector reform. One example of its work was the security sector reform analysis, which incorporated a gender perspective, that had been conducted in Ukraine to see what could be done in that conflict situation. The Swedish International Development Agency was also active in helping with the reform of election machinery.

17. **Ms. Broström** (Sweden) said that monitoring Swedish firms' fulfilment of their national and international legal obligations was the responsibility of the Ministry of Trade and Enterprise rather than that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

18. **Ms. Peyron** (Sweden) said that the asylum application procedure was the same for men and women. Residence permits were granted on the basis of an individual case-by-case assessment.

Articles 10 to 14

19. **Ms. Gbedemah** said that the Committee was impressed by the percentage of women in higher education and the feminist approach to governance in the State party. The Committee had previously recommended the introduction of temporary special measures to increase the number of women in high-ranking posts, in particular in academia. The State party had indicated in its report that it had set itself targets for

increases in the number of female university professors; however the stated targets had apparently not been met. More information on the reasons for that and on the measures to be adopted to achieve the objective would be appreciated. Alternative sources had indicated that a disproportionate amount of research grant funding went to men due to the fact that the scientific disciplines were male-dominated. What strategies were being implemented to ensure that research funding was allocated equally to men and women and to remedy the structural causes of gender imbalances in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics? The Committee was concerned at the high number of adolescent girls who reported having been the target of sexual harassment, sexism and bullying at school. More information on the guidelines made available to schools for dealing with those problems would be appreciated. It was important to integrate sexuality education into the standard curriculum. While it was commendable that acceptance of stereotypical gender roles was discouraged from the preschool stage onward, the Committee would like to know what was being done to attain a gender balance in the teaching staff at that level. The Committee would also like to receive statistics on educational opportunities for m grant women, children with disabilities and members of vulnerable groups, especially in the context of the recent influx of migrants.

20. **Ms. Pomeranzi** said that the labour participation rate for women in Sweden was among the highest in the world, but some degree of horizontal and vertical labour segregation persisted. Despite the positive steps taken in terms of parental leave and work-life balance, women still took the bulk of the parental leave made available, and women's wages had remained at 93 per cent of the level of men's wages for the last 20 years. In addition, more women worked part-time than men and most of them cited family responsibilities as the reason for that decision. What measures had been taken to reduce part-time work among women? It was essential that the Government should provide appropriate health care, childcare and services for the elderly so that women were able to combine paid work with parenthood and other family responsibilities. That was especially true for migrant women.

21. The Committee would like to know why the State party had not ratified the International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189). Had the bill on the reintroduction of mandatory annual pay surveys already been enacted and would it apply to all businesses employing 10 or more people? More information would be appreciated on the role of the Equality Ombudsman in reducing gender discrimination in employment. The Committee would also be interested to learn if there were any plans to set up a specific gender equality ombudsman. Information on any plans to provide incentives to women entrepreneurs, especially in the field of technology, would be welcome. She would like to know what measures were envisaged in order to ensure that Swedish businesses located outside the country — such as the textile firms based in Bangladesh — complied with the Convention.

22. **Ms. Pimentel** said that it was not clear if the training materials for health-care personnel mentioned in paragraph 303 of the State party's report (CEDAW/C/SWE/8-9) specifically covered women's health issues. Had women's NGOs been involved in developing the materials in question? Most of the complaints received by the Equality Ombudsman were apparently closed without any proceedings being initiated. Had any studies been conducted to determine the reason for that? The Committee would like to receive more information about the main causes of the increase in mental illness among young women, if available, and about access to contraception, abortion and prenatal care, especially among minority groups. What was the maternal mortality rate among ethnic minorities, and were any special measures in place for them in the field of reproductive health? Given that only 38 per cent of women with disabilities in the State party considered themselves to be in good health, the Committee would like to request more information on the measures being taken to improve their health and well-being. The drug-related death rate among women in the State party had risen, and the

Government appeared to be lacking a strategy with a clear gender perspective in that respect. What preventive actions were being taken to address that issue?

23. **Mr. Nilsson** (Sweden) said that gender-influenced education choices were still a pressing issue in Sweden. The Education Act guaranteed access to educational and vocational guidance for all, and the Government had tasked the National Agency for Education with improving the quality of that guidance. The Vocational Programmes Committee of Inquiry had also been given the responsibility of exploring options for improving the gender balance of apprenticeship schemes. The National Agency for Education had also been tasked with supporting schools' efforts to prevent sexual harassment by, for example providing extensive continuing professional development activities to teachers that focused on areas such as gender equality and the prevention of harassment. A report on ways of improving sex and relationships education had been made available to schools. Sweden was working to mainstream girls with disabilities and migrant girls in the education system. Only 1.3 per cent of all pupils attended non-mainstream schools. There were also a number of initiatives under way to increase the number of men working in preschools.

24. **Ms. Hellberg** (Sweden) said that the proportion of female university professors in Sweden had risen from 17 to 25 per cent since 2006. The Government was in the process of drawing up a series of measures to attract young women to careers in academia, and 5 million Swedish krona had been allocated for 2016-2019 to support universities and colleges in implementing gender mainstreaming actions. Male applicants still received more grant funds for research in the fields of medicine, science and engineering, and a large portion of the funding went to research centres, which were often headed by men. However, in the future, priority would be placed on individual grants, as women tended to be more successful in obtaining grants on that basis, and more funding would be provided for research in such areas as the humanities and social sciences. Equality between men and women in the sciences was a key aspect of the Government's policy, and a bill was to be submitted to parliament in 2016 on that subject.

25. **Mr. Jansson** (Sweden) said that there was a zero tolerance policy on threats, violence and sexual harassment in schools. The relevant legislation had been amended so that it also covered threats made via the Internet. The Government had tasked a committee with drawing up proposals for modernizing the criminal laws on threats and other abuses with the aim of developing modern criminal legislation that would provide well-balanced protection for the integrity of the person. A report had recently been published by that committee which included numerous proposals for strengthening the protection offered by the nation's criminal laws. For example, a new criminal provision had been proposed on the unlawful violation of privacy.

26. **Ms. Del Sante** (Sweden) said that Sweden had analysed the issues relating to ILO Convention No. 189 and was planning to ratify it. The Public Employment Service had formulated guidelines for counteracting gender segregation in the labour market. It had also presented a gender mainstreaming plan to the Government for achieving the State party's gender equality objectives, and that plan was currently being implemented.

27. **Ms. Bernes** (Sweden) said that foreign companies operating in Sweden were required to identify potential human rights violations and take steps to prevent them. Worldwide, the Swedish companies H&M and Ericsson were ranked among the top five early adopters of the United Nations Guiding Principles Reporting Framework.

28. **Ms. Schölin** (Sweden) said that proposed amendments to the anti-discrimination law had recently been drafted and were under review. One of those proposals was to incorporate specific references to all potential grounds of discrimination. Another was to make an annual wage survey obligatory for all employers in Sweden with more than 10 employees. Currently it was only obligatory for those with over 25 employees to do so

once every three years. Following the review, the Government planned to submit a bill to parliament to amend the existing law in the spring. She did not have any information on the reasons why complaints regarding health care that had been filed with the Equality Ombudsman had not been taken further. However, an expert had been appointed to draw up recommendations for strengthening mechanisms for enforcing the rights of persons who had experienced discrimination, and that study was to be completed in 2016.

29. **Mr. Melin** (Sweden) said that women accounted for some 70 per cent of mental illness diagnoses in Sweden. According to recent research, girls and women felt that they were subject to more stress in education and the labour market than men did; decreased social stigmatization of mental disease might also be a factor, in that young women might be seeking help more often than in the past. The Government and the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions had reached an agreement under which they would be better able to identify and respond to mental health needs; the Government was planning to spend a total of 1 billion Swedish krona on efforts to tackle mental illness. Furthermore, the recently established Commission for Equality in Health Care had been tasked with proposing ways of reducing inequalities, with special reference to women with disabilities and the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender population. While the consumption of alcohol and drugs by young women continued to be a concern, heavy drug use had been declining steadily and was now at its lowest level since 1971. The level of use of narcotic drugs, mainly cannabis, was stable, had been for a long time and was, moreover, quite low compared to other European countries. The Government had recently adopted a new gender-sensitive strategy to combat the abuse of licit and illicit drugs.

30. **Ms. Aldén** (Sweden) said that better support systems were needed to facilitate women's access to the labour market. Improved services were also needed for older people so that women did not have to sacrifice their careers in order to care for them. In addition to having adopted a national strategy on women's health, the Government of Sweden had recently commissioned the National Board of Health and Welfare to identify disparities in the health-care sector, including those that might correlate with disabilities, sexual minorities and gender. Specific agreements had been reached with local and regional governments to increase access to breast cancer screenings and to provide free contraceptives to young people. Women in vulnerable socioeconomic situations were being encouraged to avail themselves of such services. Maternal mortality rates were very low, with just three or four cases being registered per year. No specific statistics on the rates for minorities were available. Under national legislation, undocumented women also had access to basic women's health services, including contraception, abortion and gynaecological and maternity care. It was indeed much more difficult for women with disabilities to find work; actually, that was true for men with disabilities as well. The Government was firmly committed to improving the employment opportunities for persons with disabilities and was working on a new disability policy that would include a gender perspective.

31. **Ms. Nilsson Kelly** (Sweden) said that the fact that young women were more exposed to violence than men was likely connected to the high incidence of mental illness among that group. That factor would also be taken into consideration when preparing the new government strategy on women's health.

32. **Ms. Pimentel** said that she would like to know if the reported decrease in the use of alcohol and drugs related to both women and men, or only to women.

33. **Ms. Schulz** said that she was surprised to learn that it was equally difficult for women and men with disabilities to integrate into the workforce, in view of other labour market figures, such as those that indicated, for instance, that 48 per cent of women but 75 per cent of men were employed full-time. Furthermore, disability benefits were terminated for women who became employed and were terminated or greatly reduced for

women after the age of 65, which meant that they faced a stark reduction in income when they left their jobs. The State party should clarify whether women received lower pension benefits than men owing to their higher average life expectancy. If that was indeed the case, what measures were being considered to make the pension system fairer? She would like to know how the State party planned to help older women with disabilities to enter or remain in the labour market in order to maintain their standard of living.

34. **Mr. Melin** (Sweden) said that age was indeed a factor in the use of alcohol and drugs. There was a slight increase in the use rate among women of around 40 years of age, as well as among girls in secondary school. Over the past 12 months, consumption had risen by between 3 and 4 per cent, but heavy consumption had been steadily decreasing for years. While it was true that women received lower pension benefits, the Government had recently initiated a study on the pension system from a gender perspective. Its findings, which would be available in May 2016, would inform future efforts to make the system fairer.

35. **Ms. Bilici** (Sweden) said that it was indeed more difficult for women with disabilities than men with disabilities to find jobs. The Government was taking steps to facilitate access to the labour market for persons with disabilities and to provide follow-up support in that regard; however, there were no specific measures targeting women.

36. **Ms. Ameline** asked if the State party was taking a proactive approach to involving women, including at the decision-making level, in sustainable development policies. New technologies might allow for more flexible working conditions and therefore facilitate women's access to the labour market.

37. **Ms. Broström** (Sweden) said that the Government of Sweden had adopted proactive policies, specifically in the field of education, that enabled women to play a greater role in the forestry industry, which was a vital sector for the Swedish economy.

38. **Ms. Bernes** (Sweden) said that one of the Government's main focuses was to promote the participation of women and girls in the economy and in environmental affairs. A number of bilateral and multilateral meetings, including several high-level ministerial conferences, had been held to follow up on related measures.

39. **Ms. Baralt** (Sweden) said that the Government sought to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at all levels, including locally. In rural areas, initiatives dealing with sustainable development and small-scale agriculture were often driven by women. Experience had shown that funding for small and medium-sized enterprises was more often allocated to men than to women. It was important to understand the reasons for that, including what made women less likely to apply for such funding, in order to design a more equitable system of distribution. There was no doubt that women would play a crucial role in sustainable development efforts.

Articles 15 and 16

40. **Ms. Halperin-Kaddari** said that, especially in European countries, instances of forced marriage and female genital mutilation were on the rise; moreover, in communities that maintained such practices, forced marriages were often polygamous. Since the State party was responsible for eradicating such harmful practices, she would like to know whether it was aware of their existence and, if so, what it was doing to eradicate them.

41. Regarding the economic consequences of divorce, while she appreciated the State party's reluctance to take an approach that might send the wrong message to the public about women's independence in marriage, there was sometimes a discrepancy between an ideal society and reality. The reporting State should therefore rigorously examine the

consequences of divorce for women and men in order to determine whether any changes in policies were needed, taking into account the Committee's recently adopted general recommendation No. 29 on the economic consequences of marriage, family relations and their dissolution. While the State party was to be commended for its near-default position of joint custody of children, except in cases where so-called alternating residence could expose a child to risk, the Committee had received information according to which the courts did not always consider the potential risk factors for children. She wondered if the State party was aware of any such cases and whether courts were still mandating joint custody even when the parents themselves did not agree with that arrangement.

42. **Ms. Aldén** (Sweden) said that it was important for the procedures involved in divorce, which was on the rise in Sweden, as in most countries, to be as smooth as possible, since that would be in the best social and economic interests of divorcing couples and their children. To help to achieve that objective, the Government had established the Family Law and Parental Support Authority in September 2015.

43. **Mr. Olsson** (Sweden) said that polygamy was illegal in Sweden and therefore not recognized or widely discussed. As for child custody, in 2014 the Government had commissioned an inquiry to investigate how rules on custody and residence were applied in practice and to determine how they might need to be amended in order to strengthen children's rights; measures to reinforce children's right to express their views and to make the transfer of custody more efficient in cases of violence within a family were under consideration. The results of the inquiry would be available in October 2016.

44. **Ms. Baralt** (Sweden) said that, as far as the Government of Sweden was aware, polygamy was not widespread. Women and girls entering the country were given very clear information about their rights. It was possible that cases of polygamy existed but went unreported; the Government would look into the situation. She was hopeful that the current Administration, which had come into office in 2014, would do much to advance the rights of women and girls by, among other steps, acting upon the Committee's concluding observations once received.

45. **The Chair** commended the State party for its efforts and encouraged it to take all necessary measures to respond to the recommendations of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 4.55 p.m.